Harrison Bergeron Study Guide

Harrison Bergeron by Kurt Vonnegut

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

"Harrison Bergeron" was first published in the October, 1961, issue of the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.* It was Vonnegut's third publication in a science fiction magazine following the drying up of the once-lucrative weekly family magazine market where he had published more than twenty stories between 1950 and 1961. The story did not receive any critical attention, however, until 1968 when it appeared in Vonnegut's collection

Welcome to the Monkey House. Initial reviews of the collection generally were less than favorable, with even more positive reviewers, such as Mitchel Levitas in the *New York Times* and Charles Nicol in the *Atlantic Monthly,* commenting negatively on the commercial quality of many of the stories. By the late 1980s, however, "Harrison Bergeron" was being reprinted in high school and college literature anthologies. Popular aspects of the story include Vonnegut's satire of both enforced equality and the power of the Handicapper General, and the enervating effect television can have on viewers. "Harri-son Bergeron" likely draws upon a controversial 1961 speech by then Federal Communications Commission chairman Newton Minow titled "The Vast Wasteland," a reference to a supposed dearth of quality in television programming. Coincidentally, "Harrison Bergeron" also alludes to the George Burns and Gracie Allen television show, a weekly situation comedy and variety show popular in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Vonnegut has said that he learned most of what he believes about social and political idealism from junior civics class, as well as from the democratic institution of the public school itself. A futuristic story dealing with universal themes of equality, freedom, power and its abuses, and media influence, "Harrison Bergeron" continues to evoke thoughtful responses about equality and individual freedom in the United States.

Author Biography

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., was born in 1922, the youngest of three children of Edith and Kurt Vonnegut, in Indianapolis, Indiana. His siblings had attended private schools, but financial difficulties during the Great Depression meant that Vonnegut had to attend public schools. He has said that he gleaned the basis of his political and social beliefs from his junior civics class.

After graduation, Vonnegut attended Cornell University. In 1943, during World War II, he enlisted in the U. S. Army. In 1944, he was captured by German soldiers and sent to Dresden, Germany, where he survived the bombing raids of February, 1945. After the war, Vonnegut married Jane Cox and moved to Chicago where he worked as a newspaper reporter and attended the University of Chicago. However, he left Chicago for a public relations job with General Electric in Schenectady, New York, before completing his master's degree in anthropology.

While working for General Electric, Vonnegut sold his first story, "Report on the Barnhouse Effect," to *Collier's* magazine; it was published in 1950. With the money from the sale of that story and three others, he quit his job in 1951, moved to Cape Cod, and embarked on a career as a writer. To supplement his income, he wrote public relations copy, taught school, and sold automobiles. His first novel, *Player Piano,* appeared in 1952, followed by *The Sirens of Titan* in 1959; *Canary in a Cat House* (short story collection), 1961; *Mother Night,* 1962; *Cat's Cradle,* 1963; and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater,* 1964. *Welcome to the Monkey House,* which includes "Harrison Bergeron," was Vonnegut's second collection of stories and was published in 1968. In the mid-1960s, Vonnegut began to attract some critical attention, but he did not become a well-known author until the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five* in 1969. His first marriage ended early in the 1970s, and he later married photographer Jill Krementz. The 1970s and 1980s

saw the publication of six more of Vonnegut's novels, including *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), *Jailbird* (1979), and *Galapagos* (1985). He has also published a book of "opinions": *Wampeters, Foma, and Granfalloons* (1974); and two autobiographical books: *Palm Sunday* (1981), and *Fates Worse Than Death* (1991).

The acclaim which met the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five* led to much public recognition for Vonnegut. He has become an outspoken defender of free speech and an eloquent attacker of censorship. His critical reputation has been uneven, however. While several books devoted to Vonnegut's work were published in the 1970s, Vonnegut's later works have not been as well received by scholars as his earlier novels. Early critical attention tried to determine whether Vonnegut was a satirist, a black humorist, or a science fiction writer; this debate continues. His works are noted for their frank and insightful social criticism, and for their innovative style; they present readers with an idiosyncratic yet compelling vision of modern life.

Plot Summary

"Harrison Bergeron" is set in the future, when Constitutional Amendments have made everyone equal. The agents of the Handicapper General (H-G men, an allusion to the practice in the 1940s and 1950s of referring to Federal Bureau of Investigation and Secret Service officers as G-men, the G standing for government) enforce the equality laws.

People are made equal by devices which bring them down to the normalcy level in the story, which is actually below-average in intelligence, strength, and ability. These devices include weights to stunt speed and strength; masks, red rubber clown noses, or thick glasses to hide good looks and to make seeing difficult; and radio transmitters implanted in the ears of intelligent people, which emit sharp noises two or three times a minute to prevent sustained thought.

In April, described as "clammy" and driving "people crazy by not being springtime," H-G men take Harrison Bergeron—son of George and Hazel Bergeron—to jail on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government. At the age of fourteen, seven-foot-tall Harrison is a genius and an athlete who bears heavier handicaps and more grotesque masking devices than anyone else. George and Hazel are watching a dance program on television and discussing George's handicaps, especially the different sounds transmitted to his mental handicap radio and the forty-seven pounds of birdshot in a canvas bag he wears around his neck. As a "normal" person who wears no handicaps, Hazel takes interest in the various sounds transmitted through George's radio. She also encourages George to remove a few lead balls from his handicap bag, at least just when he is home from work, to lighten his load. Hazel's suggestion to bend the rules leads George to defend their society and its laws.

A news bulletin announcing Harrison's escape from jail interrupts the dance program, followed soon thereafter by a live shot of Harrison breaking down the television studio door and addressing the dancers, musicians, and audience. He declares himself emperor, proclaiming that everyone must do what he says at once, and further asserts his superiority even with the significant handicaps he bears: "Even as I stand here—crippled, hobbled, sickened—I am a greater ruler than any man who ever lived! Now watch me become what I can become!" He tears off his handicaps, chooses one of the ballerinas as his empress, and proceeds, with her, to show people "the meaning of the word dance." In the process, they defy the laws of the land, the laws of gravity, and the laws of motion by leaping high enough to kiss the thirty-foot high ceiling. Remaining suspended in air a few inches below the ceiling, they linger over a long kiss which is interrupted by Handicapper General Diana Moon Glampers, who kills Harrison and the ballerina instantly with a double-blast of her shotgun. Hazel and George witness their son's death, but both forget why they are so sad immediately afterwards. George advises Hazel to forget sad things, and then the sound of a riveting gun in George's ear-radio leads them into a verbal exchange echoing comic lines popularized by comedians George Burns and Gracie Allen, from the closing dialogue of their television show.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

"Harrison Bergeron" is a short story set in the year 2081. It takes place in the United States of America, in the living room of George and Hazel Bergeron. This is a time when the 211th, 212th, and 213th amendments to the Constitution have made equality the law. This means that all people are seen as equal in every way, in intelligence, in beauty, in athleticism, and in talent.

People who seem to be above average in any area are given handicaps by the United States Handicapper General. These handicaps are forms of physical handicaps that are placed upon the individuals in order to bring them down to an average level. For example, a strong man may be given a forty-seven pound bag of birdshot to wear around his neck. Those who have above average intelligence are given little radio transmitters that make obnoxious noises inside their heads every twenty seconds. These transmitters are designed to prevent anyone from thinking about any one thing or idea for more than twenty seconds at a time.

Hazel Bergeron is considered to be of average intelligence, which means that she naturally cannot think of anything for a long period of time. She cannot concentrate on any single idea for more than a few seconds. Her husband, George, is of a higher level of intelligence, though. George wears a radio transmitter in his head, as a result. Anytime he begins to think of something new, a horrible noise explodes in his head causing him to lose focus and become mentally disoriented. Hazel and George have a fourteen-year-old son named Harrison. Harrison is absent from the initial action of the story, though the narrator mentions that he has been hauled away to prison recently.

As the story opens, Hazel and George are in their living room watching ballerinas on television. Even the ballerinas are not allowed to be particularly talented at dancing. Nor are they allowed to display their beauty. They wear ugly masks and carry bags of birdshot tied to their bodies to weigh them down. Two of the ballerinas seem to be wearing radio transmitters in their heads, because each time George gets zapped with a new sound, the two ballerinas on television wince in agony as well.

As George and Hazel watch the ballerinas, they try to have a conversation, but everything they say either gets interrupted by the noise in George's head or by Hazel's loss of focus. At one point, Hazel makes the point that she believes she would be a good Handicapper General. George says she would be just as good as anyone else would be. The two of them even have trouble recalling parts of the conversation from one sentence to the next. Suddenly, though, the television show is interrupted by Breaking News.

The announcer tries to speak, but his speech impediment prevents him from getting the message across clearly. Therefore, he hands the message to one of the ballerinas to

read. The Breaking News is that Harrison Bergeron has just escaped from prison. A picture is shown on the screen of him, reflecting that he is seven-feet tall. The ballerina-announcer says that Harrison is a genius and he is very athletic. He is to be considered dangerous, and anyone who sees him should avoid making any conversation with him. Harrison carries three hundred pounds of scrap metal and iron as his handicaps. He is made to wear special glasses that make him almost half-blind and give him terrible headaches. Harrison also has to wear a red rubber ball on his nose in order to offset his better-than-average good looks. Harrison is so intelligent that the traditional radio transmitter is not a strong enough handicap for him; he has to wear huge earphones strapped to his head instead. He is under arrest for attempting to overthrow the government.

Just as the ballerina is describing the fourteen-year-old genius fugitive, the studio begins to shake, as if an earthquake is striking. Suddenly, Harrison Bergeron is in the studio. He is a giant, and he is shackled with huge pieces of iron and scrap metal tied to him. He rips off his handicaps and declares himself the emperor of all the land. He wants to claim an empress to be his mate, and tells the ballerinas that the first one who volunteers will be his mate. A beautiful woman rips off her mask. Harrison and his lady begin to dance as he commands the musicians to tear away their handicaps so they can play phenomenal music. The music becomes more sensual, and the couple dances and soars into the air, kissing the ceiling at one point. As they dance, the H-G men arrive and immediately shoot Harrison and the ballerina dead on the spot. The men command the musicians to replace all of their handicaps or they too will be shot within ten seconds. The musicians comply.

Back in the living room at the Bergerons' house, George and Hazel have just witnessed the murder of their son on live television. Hazel is crying and George is hearing a tremendous round of gunshots firing in his head. Once the noise in his head stops, George asks Hazel why she is crying. She says she cannot remember exactly, but she knows she saw something sad on television. George himself has no idea what was so sad on television either.

Analysis

Nearly every child who attends school in the United States of America will, at some point in time, be required to memorize these words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." Yet, one can look around at the many colors and sizes of the people of the world and clearly see that there are obvious differences among the human race. In this very short, but poignant, short story, Kurt Vonnegut Jr. has taken a satirical look at the equality among the American race.

Equality, as intended by the framers of the Constitution, implies equality under the law, that every law shall apply to every citizen equally without prejudice. Such equality does not imply that every person is equally as intelligent, strong, or beautiful as every other person. It does not imply that every person is equally responsible as every other, nor does it imply that all people are equally as wealthy as each other.

In Harrison Bergeron's 2081 America, though, the notion of equality has been extended to blanket every aspect of an individual's life. No one person can be any better than any other person in any way. The government has laws to protect against such atrocities. Those who do not abide by the laws, those who refuse to endure the government-issued handicaps, must face serious consequences, including imprisonment and death. These laws have been implemented in order to dissolve the competition among Americans. Not allowing any single person any advantage over all the rest, also allows that no person will be worse off; no one will be disadvantaged.

There may be some significance to the fact that a higher percentage of men in the story have a higher intelligence level than women. Of the nine women in the story (eight ballerinas and Hazel), only two must wear the radio transmitters. Of the three men who are in the story (George, Harrison, and the television announcer) two are of superior intelligence. Perhaps Vonnegut insinuates that there are more men who highly intelligent than there are women who are highly intelligent.

Harrison's age creates a sense of invincibility and rebellion that make him fearless. He tears away from his shackles honestly believing that he will escape the horrid, mindless world to which they tie him. At fourteen, he lacks the foresight to understand that the government is bigger and stronger even than he is. He lacks the mental acuity to realize that even with all his strength and intelligence, he is only one man; one man is no challenge to a nation full of opposition. Had Harrison been older, he would have been wiser and more experienced; thus, he would have lived through the ratification of the constitutional amendments that caused his world to become the level playing field that it had become. Harrison, at fourteen, could not possibly understand the strength of a nation determined to bar itself from individual excellence.

Harrison Bergeron symbolizes the hopes and dreams of all Americans. He is the smarter, better-looking, stronger person that so many others wish they could be. He is also only fourteen years old. He is even the younger person so many folks wish to be. In killing him, the government officials essentially make the statement that any person willing to live out their dreams will die. The government kills the aspirations of every citizen in this nightmarish world of equality.

Characters

George Bergeron

Harrison's father, George Bergeron, bears multiple government-imposed handicaps which repress his "way above-normal" intelligence. He refuses to remove any of them, however, for he believes that any attempt to change the present situation will inevitably cause civilization to regress back into the "dark ages," when there was competition. George and Hazel, his wife, witness Harrison's rebellious act on television, but afterwards cannot remember why they are sad. George wears birdshot weights and a mental handicap radio in his ear that receives a "sharp noise" transmission designed "to keep people . . . from taking unfair advantage of their brains."

Harrison Bergeron

Although he is only fourteen years old, the title character, Harrison Bergeron, stands seven feet tall and possesses an intelligence so immense that, at the beginning of the story, the Handicapper General has Harrison arrested "on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government." Harrison escapes, however, and goes to the television station to publicly declare himself emperor. He selects a ballerina as his empress, and the two begin to dance. "[N]eutralizing gravity with love and pure will," the couple leap high enough to kiss the ceiling and remain suspended in mid air. At that moment, Diana Moon Glampers, the United States Handicapper General, blasts the couple out of the air with a "double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun," ending Harrison's life and his self-declared reign.

Harrison's actions suggest an ironic theme: corruptive power. Upon his escape, Harrison repeats government errors by establishing himself as the sole, nonelected, source of governmental authority. Had his rebellion succeeded, he would have forced people to break the law by making them remove their government-imposed handicaps. That act, according to Harrison's father, George, would send society back to the "dark ages" of social and individual competition.

Hazel Bergeron

Harrison's mother, Hazel Bergeron, does not need to wear any handicaps—mental or physical—as she possesses "normal" intelligence, appearance, and strength. In this story, however, "normal" entails that one is incompetent, or unable to fathom anything beyond that which is superficial. Hazel's dialogue with her husband, George, recalls the comedic team of George Burns and Gracie Allen.

Diana Moon Glampers

Although Diana Moon Glampers, the United States Handicapper General, appears briefly toward the end of the story in order to quell Harrison's rebellion by killing him, her presence pervades the story. As Handicapper General, she ruthlessly maintains law and order without due process. One of the few descriptions of her implies that Glampers herself is not "above normal."

Themes

Freedom

As a theme, freedom remains in the background of the story, emerging when Harrison escapes from jail. In the story's futuristic society, freedom is no longer a bedrock American value; enforcing the law that makes those who are "above normal" equal to those who are "normal" has become the major social value. Forced equality by handicapping the above-normal individuals evolved as a response to the demonized concept of competition (which existed in "the dark ages") in all its possible forms. Vonnegut suggests that freedom can be taken away relatively easily, especially since the forced equality in the story has been authorized by Amendments to the Constitution.

Civil Rights

Civil rights have become extinct in "Harrison Bergeron." The culture values mediocrity to the point that the people accept oppressive measures in the name of equality. Ironically, no one really benefits from these misguided attempts to enforce equality, except perhaps the incompetent, such as the television announcer who, "like all announcers, had a serious speech impediment." In Hazel's words, the announcer's incompetence should be forgiven because his attempt is "the big thing. He tried to do the best he could with what God gave him. He should get a nice raise for trying so hard." Should anyone in that society dare to become above average, he or she is immediately punished, as is Harrison, who is executed for shunning mediocrity and attempting to excel. By creating a society where the goal of equality has resulted in a grotesque caricature of humanity, Vonnegut implies that individual civil rights should never be sacrificed, not even for the alleged common good.

Knowledge and Ignorance

Everyone above average in any way has been forced by the government to bear a physical handicap that makes him or her "normal." People who are more intelligent or knowledgeable than the average person have had their knowledge subverted by such devices as the mental handicap ear radio. This device emits various noises every twenty seconds or so to prevent people from taking "unfair advantage of their brains." "Normal" in the story can best be described as subnormal, incompetent, and ignorant. Hazel is a case in point; as a normal person, she wears no handicaps, and she has a good heart, yet she knows very little about anything and cannot remember what she just saw or heard a moment ago. At the end of the story, she takes literally George's intensifying statement, "You can say that again," by repeating what she just said. Vonnegut suggests that an authoritarian government thrives on the ignorance of the people and on the suppression of intelligence and knowledge.

Law and Order

In addition to the critique of authoritarian government in the form of the Handicapper General agents (H-G men), Vonnegut discusses the ways in which the Handicapper General uses the fear of competition to make obeying the laws an ethical decision. Hazel feels sorry for George, who has to wear forty-seven pounds of birdshot around his neck, so she invites him to lighten his load. He rejects the idea of cheating (breaking the law) with a recital of the punishment: "two years in prison and two thousand dollars for every [lead birdshot] ball" taken out. He continues by describing the bandwagon effect: other people would try to break the law if George could do so. He asserts that backsliding would result in a return "to the dark ages, with everybody competing against everybody else." Cheating on laws, George claims (or is about to claim when a siren blast through his mental handicap radio shatters his concentration), would reduce society to chaos. Here, Vonnegut satirizes the fear of change and of uncertainty: victims of the oppressive law want to enforce it rather than take their chances without it.

Strength and Weakness

One of the implied reasons Harrison may want to overthrow the government has to do with strength and weakness. He recognizes the inequality of forcing strong people (those mentally, intellectually, and physically strong) to give up their strength for an orderly society of equal, law-abiding citizens. Of course, the enforcers of the law do not have to submit to forced equality themselves; they have no handicaps, which could signify their inherent mediocrity, as does the implied physical resemblance of Hazel to Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General herself. Vonnegut shows what extraordinary strength can do: defy the laws of gravity and motion. But Vonnegut also shows that strength can be used to oppress the weak, even in the name of protecting the weak against the excesses of the strong.

Ubermensch ("Superman")

The idea of the superhuman materializes in the character of Harrison. Though only fourteen years old, at seven feet tall with a high intellect, he exceeds the physical and intellectual abilities of anyone else in the story. Likewise, his physical appearance, judged by the kinds of handicaps he must wear, suggests an Adonis-like figure. His handicaps include thick, wavy-lens spectacles; a red rubber clown nose; and snaggle tooth black caps for his teeth. His natural abilities do not make him immortal, however; like other human beings, he can die from an antiquated weapon like the ten-gauge double-barreled shotgun of Diana Moon Glampers. Harrison's attempt to assert his authority neither lasts long nor has any real effect on anyone. Truly befitting the superman concept, he declares himself emperor, "a greater ruler than any man who ever lived" (even with his handicaps). He does not recognize, however, his human flaw: replacing one authoritarian government with another. Like so many other revolutions, Harrison's short-lived attempt to overthrow the ruthless totalitarianism that has become

the American government becomes totalitarian itself. Vonnegut suggests that power, whether invested in the government or in the individual figure, corrupts.

American Dream

The American Dream, best described as upward social and economic class mobility through hard work and education has become an American Nightmare in "Harrison Bergeron." No one, except the Handicapper General agents, can achieve upward mobility, either because they bear artificial handicaps or because they are naturally mediocre. In a scheme that brings anyone who is above normal in *any* aspect down to the level of a person who is normal in *all* aspects, no one can dream about moving upward.

Media Influence

Vonnegut suggests the powerful influence of broadcast media in the story. Radio is the medium of the mental handicap noises used to prevent anyone with the ability to think from doing so. But television accomplishes the same thing for normal people like Hazel, who "had a perfectly average intelligence, which meant she couldn't think about anything except in short bursts." This lack of concentration has come to be known as short attention span, or attention deficit disorder. Many critics credit television for the decreasing attention span of the population. They also suggest television programming desensitizes people to real life, in part because it requires nothing of the viewer. Significantly, approximately five months before publication of the story in 1961, Newton Minow, new chair of the Federal Communications Commission (a government agency that regulates broadcast media), called television a "vast wasteland" of mediocrity in programming. Vonnegut suggests the importance of television as a means of controlling information by having Harrison Bergeron take over the television studio and proclaim himself emperor. Vonnegut also shows the numbing influence of television by having Hazel forget what she has seen—her son's killing—even though she reacts by recognizing that something sad has happened.

Style

Setting

Setting the story 120 years in the future allows readers to more easily accept some of the more absurd events in "Harrison Bergeron." The actual physical location of the story does not matter and, therefore, is unknown. One glaring *anachronism*—a concept or an object not known or invented at the time of the story; or an object that belongs to a previous era—should be noted: the use of a shotgun. Readers might expect that some exotic form of weaponry would have been developed and used that far into the future. Similarly, the idea that 213 Amendments to the Constitution would have been ratified predicts a radical change in American legislation. At the time the story was written, only twenty-four amendments had been passed by the Congress and ratified by the states, the first ten of which (known as the Bill of Rights) became law in 1791. In the 170 years between 1791 and the time the story was written, only fourteen additional amendments had been ratified. Ironically, the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments of the story restrict the civil rights of most people, as opposed to the amendments over the first two hundred years of the nation.

Point of View

The story is told in the third-person-limited point of view; the narrator is not a character in the story, but he is privy to the thoughts of one character. Readers are allowed to know what George Bergeron is thinking, as when he "was toying with the vague notion that maybe dancers shouldn't be handicapped." The events in "Harrison Bergeron" are related by an objective narrator. The narrator does not draw conclusions, make decisions, or make judgments about the events. The objectivity of the narrator suggests a distancing from the hostile world of the story.

Satire and Black Humor

The story uses satire and a kind of humor known as black humor. The humor mostly involves George and Hazel, although the appearance of Harrison (red rubber nose, artificially snaggle-toothed, three hundred pounds of handicaps) can be seen as comical. George and Hazel's dialogue at the end of the story alludes to comics George Burns and Gracie Allen, who had a popular television show in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At the end of each show, George and Gracie performed a stand-up routine related to that night's episode. Often, George would say to Gracie, "You can say that again," and she would reply the same way Hazel replies to George Bergeron: She would literally repeat what she had just said. Gracie Allen's comic persona mirrors Hazel's persona; both seem somewhat scatterbrained. The humorous dialogue between Hazel and George Bergeron could be considered black humor, which has proved difficult to define. Related to both sick humor (making fun of, say, a person's disability)

and gallows humor (people laughing in the midst of helplessness), as well as the absurd (so far-fetched as to be nearly implausible), black humor can incorporate all of these characteristics. It can be defined as the juxtaposition of pain and laughter, unusual fact and calmly inadequate reactions, and cruelty and tenderness. The ending dialogue between Hazel and George juxtaposes all three of those pairs, as Hazel and George have just witnessed the killing of their son. Satire, ridiculing a person, place, or idea with the notion of effecting change, always involves morality. Here, Vonnegut satirizes the notion of handicapping people to enforce equality, the failure of rebellion, the apathy engendered in people who watch television, and authoritarian government. As Conrad Festa claims in *Vonnegut in America,*

Stories such as "Harrison Bergeron" . . . fit easily and recognizably into the satiric genre. That is, they (1) sustain a reductive attack on their objects, (2) convey to their intended readers significances at odds with the literal or surface meanings, and (3) are pervaded and dominated by various satiric techniques.

Allusion

Vonnegut uses several allusions—references to people, historical events, and other literature outside the text—in "Harrison Bergeron." The month of April, which "still drove people crazy by not being springtime," is doubly allusive, initially referring to the first line of T. S. Eliot's 1922 poem, *The Waste Land* : "April is the cruelest month...." The second allusion derived from April stems from the first: the title of the poem also serves in part as the title of a 1961 speech by then Federal Communications Commission Chair Newton Minow, referring to television as "a vast wasteland." The abbreviation of the Handicapper-General agents, "H-G men," ironically alludes to the abbreviation "G-men" (for government agents; i.e., Secret Service agents, FBI agents). Generally, these government agents were held in high esteem, unlike the H-G men, until the 1960s and 1970s, when their activities came into legal and ethical question. The allusion of Diana Moon, the Handicapper General's first and middle names, refers to the Roman goddess of the hunt, Diana, who is associated with the moon. Diana was known for her vengeance, which could explain the ruthless killing of Harrison Bergeron in the story. Thor, identified in the story as the god of thunder, was, in Norse mythology, the oldest and most powerful son of Odin, king of the gods. He possessed great strength and skill in fighting. This allusion serves to underscore Harrison's strength without his handicaps. There is an indirect reference to cartoonist Rube Goldberg, which highlights the absurdity of the handicapping technology, especially for such a futuristic story. Rube Goldberg's cartoons generally depicted elaborate schemes to accomplish the simplest tasks. For instance, instead of an alarm clock, Goldberg might construct a chain of events from the sun reflecting light onto a bird, which might then peck at a string, which would then release a bowling ball that would trip a lever, opening a door to a rooster cage, allowing the rooster to emerge and signal an alarm with his crowing. The more complex these mechanisms are, the funnier. Thus, the various handicaps described in the story seem much like Rube Goldberg cartoons, and seem humorous to readers who recognize the allusion. The final allusion is to the comedy team of George Burns and Gracie Allen, and to their television show. The dialogue at the end of the story reflects

similar dialogues at the end of the "Burns and Allen" television show. Gracie, who played a scatterbrain, would indeed repeat lines when George used the phrase, "You can say that again," just as Hazel Bergeron does in the story. Television's role in the story is to numb, desensitize, or otherwise occupy the time of citizens, and to prevent sustained thought on the part of those of normal intelligence.

Historical Context

The Modern Civil Rights Movement

In the late 1940s progress, albeit in fits and starts, began to occur in the movement toward full civil rights for African Americans in the United States. Beginning with Jackie Robinson, major league baseball began the process of integration, as did the military in the late 1940s. In the 1954 case known as

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, the United States Supreme Court decided that the doctrine of "separate but equal" facilities set forth in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case no longer held true. A year later, the Supreme Court ordered lower courts to use "all deliberate speed" in desegregating the public schools. In the Deep South, governors, state legislatures, and local school boards resisted, in some cases passing laws to try to thwart the ruling. In addition to the landmark Supreme Court ruling, an African-American woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the front of a Montgomery, Alabama, bus to sit in the back as a local ordinance required. Her subsequent arrest led to a boycott of downtown businesses by African Americans. It also gave the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., an opportunity to begin his crusade for civil rights long denied African Americans in the South. In September, 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower had to call out the Arkansas National Guard, as well as regular Army troops, to enforce desegregation of Little Rock, Arkansas, schools. In February, 1960, four African-American students began what became known as "sit-ins" when they sat down at a lunch counter for whites only in Greensboro, North Carolina. Sit-ins became a standard tactic in the civil rights movement, as was also true of the "Freedom Rides" (busloads of whites and African Americans who came to the South to help support voter registration drives and other civil rights activities) which began in 1961, the year "Harrison Bergeron" was published. Also in 1960, the U. S. Congress passed another civil rights act that allowed federal authorities to ensure that states allowed African Americans the unfettered right to register to vote. Even though the civil rights movement does not specifically relate to "Harrison Bergeron," it stands in the background as being one of the compelling public issues of the time. Vonnegut's use of the issue of equality in the story ignores the racial context on the surface, but it clearly invokes the fears of many, mostly white citizens who feared the federal government would in some way propose schemes that would enforce equality of outcome. Many apparently felt that desegregating the public schools and other facilities amounted to the same kind of tyranny exposed in the story.

The Cold War and Communism

The kind of government authority seen in "Harri-son Bergeron" both mimics and satirizes the way Americans came to see the enemy—socialism/communism and, specifically, the Soviet Union (USSR)—during the Cold War, which was near its height of distrust and fear in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Schools in different states

introduced courses such as Communism vs. Americanism during the 1950s to wage the propaganda war at home. The fear of nuclear war led thousands of Americans to build bomb shelters in their backyards. Following Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's promise to "bury" the United States in the late 1950s, significant fear of an authoritarian government taking over the so-called free world intensified in America. Communism as practiced in the USSR and in China meant a tyrannical rule without due process of law enforced by secret police and informers, similar to the way the United States is portrayed in the story. Making the fear more ominous and close to home was Fidel Castro's successful rebellion in Cuba, ending in 1959. By the middle of 1960, Americans realized that Castro was building a socialist state allied with and supported by the USSR. An attempt by the Soviet Union to station missiles in Cuba led to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Trade sanctions against Cuba began in 1960 and continue in the late 1990s. The paranoid climate caused by the establishment of a communist government a mere ninety miles from the United States sent many citizens into panic. Vonnegut recognized that the way communism was practiced led to the failure of its basic promise of providing a workers' paradise of equality in a classless society.

Television and American Culture

One of the few scholarly mentions of "Harrison Bergeron" occurs in Robert Uphaus's essay, "Expected Meanings in Vonnegut's Dead-End Fiction." Uphaus identifies the basis of the catastrophe known as the United States government in 2081: television. He asserts, "The history of mankind, Vonnegut implies in the story, is a history of progressive desensitization partly spurred on by the advent of television." Coincidentally, then newly appointed chair of the Federal Communications Commission, Newton Minow, delivered an attack on television five months before "Harrison Bergeron" was published. In the speech, Minow called television "a vast wasteland" of destructive or meaningless programs. Minow claimed that instead of challenging people to think, television programming was making it easier for people to avoid serious thought. The story clearly uses television as a time filler, a method of preventing average people from thinking, similar to Minow's description. Hazel Bergeron best illustrates this point. Although of "perfectly average intelligence," she has such a short attention span that she is prevented from remembering why she cries at "Something real sad [she saw] on television": the murder of her son, Harrison. While Vonnegut aims his satiric barbs at overreaching, authoritarian government, television equally bears the brunt of his attack for its role in the erosion of thought. Vonnegut suggests that television serves the same purpose for normal people that the mental handicap radios serve for those above normal in intelligence.

World War II

Vonnegut's skepticism of government power and of scientific solutions to problems comes from his experiences in World War II. Specifically, he was disillusioned by the lies told in the name of winning the war and by the mass destruction caused by application of scientific discoveries to weaponry. As a prisoner of war, Vonnegut

survived the Allied bombing raids on Dresden, Germany, in February, 1945. There, over 135,000 people—mostly civilians—died from the bombing, more than the total killed by both atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, later that year. Vonnegut has recounted this story in various places, most notably his 1969 novel *Slaughterhouse-Five, or the Children's Crusade.* In his 1991 autobiographical collage, *Fates Worse Than Death,* Vonnegut reprints a directory carried aboard British and American bombers in World War II showing "there wasn't much in the Dresden area worth bombing out of business according to our Intelligence experts." The reason Vonnegut harps on this issue is that the Dresden raids were kept secret from the public for almost twenty years, and then were defended by the claim that Dresden contained targets of military importance. He notes that this act and the subsequent secrecy disillusioned him about his government. This realization that the government can and does lie to its citizens, for ill or for good, serves as the premise for distrust of government power in "Harrison Bergeron."

Critical Overview

The first critical responses to "Harrison Bergeron" did not appear until 1968, when the story was reprinted in Vonnegut's collection *Welcome to the Monkey House.* Many reviewers, like Larry L. King in *New York Times Book Review,* who called the collection "old soup," were decidedly unenthusiastic. Some of the stories had already been published in an earlier collection titled *Canary in a Cat House* (1961), and others had been first published in commercial, "slick" magazines, thus bringing into question their literary value. Criticizing "Harrison Bergeron," King claimed, "I know nothing of Mr. Vonnegut's personal politics, but extant Goldwaterites or Dixiecrats might read into this the ultimate horrors of any further extension of civil-rights or equal-opportunity laws." The term *Goldwaterites* refers to admirers of former Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, the 1964 Republican candidate for President, who was known as "Mr. Conservative." The term *Dixiecrats* refers to white Southerners who stood strongly (and sometimes violently) against extending civil rights to African Americans throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, by the time of King's review, political conservatives who stood against federal government civil rights laws had already appropriated the story for William F. Buck-ley's *National Review* magazine (November 16, 1965). King's early review identified what has become one of the most controversial aspects of the story: how the story can easily be read as a criticism of measures advocated by minorities and women to ensure equality. Vonnegut pokes fun at the absurd and extreme steps taken to ensure equality in the futuristic society, with cumbersome low-technology handicaps forced on above-average citizens upon pain of severe punishment. "Harrison Bergeron" has been used more recently to illustrate the conflict between the American political ideology of equality and the practice of discrimination based on superficial traits such as race and gender. In 1982 political conservatives again used "Harrison Bergeron" to oppose affirmative action and other social programs: a book published by Canada's Fraser Institute in 1982, *Discrimination, Affirmative Action, and Equal Opportunity: An Economic and Social Perspective,* used the story as the title for its last chapter.

Some early reviewers of *Welcome to the Monkey House,* such as Charles Nicol in the *Atlantic Monthly* and Michael Levitas in the *New York Times,* ignored "Harrison Bergeron." Other critics, such as Gerard Reedy in *America,* focused on the title character as an "all-American boy," and compared Vonnegut's character to similar characters created by other contemporary authors such as John Updike and Philip Roth. Reedy found that Vonnegut, in contrast to the other authors, was "not as serious" in his "satire of American types," and "[a] social critic only by indirection." Levitas's review, like King's, focused on the recycled nature of the commercial stories. Quoting Vonnegut's own introduction, in which he commented, "Here one finds the fruits of Free Enterprise," Levitas paraphrased Lamont Cranston (the original title character of the radio show *The Shadow*) by claiming "the seeds of Free Enterprise bear bitter fruit." Charles Nicol at least mentioned "Vonnegut's special enemies," some of which surface as themes in "Harrison Bergeron": "science, morality, free enterprise, socialism, fascism, Communism, any force in our lives which regards human beings as ciphers."

The story's outward focus on the idea of equality forced by law has made it a popular choice for high school and college literature anthologies, even though the story itself has received little scholarly attention. Vonnegut's literary reputation rests more on his novels than on his short fiction, and Vonnegut himself has said he wrote stories to earn money so could work on his novels. Many reviewers of *Welcome to the Monkey House* agree with Vonnegut's apparent devaluation of the stories.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Alvarez is an instructor in the English and Foreign Languages department at Central Piedmont Community College in North Carolina. In the following essay, he discusses "Harrison Bergeron" in light of Vonnegut's own beliefs about conditions in society.

In his *Fates Worse Than Death: An Autobiographical Collage of the 1980s* Kurt Vonnegut reflected on a 1983 speech he gave at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City:

American TV, operating in the Free Market of Ideas . . . was holding audiences with simulations of one of the two things most human beings, and especially young ones, can't help watching when given the opportunity: murder. TV, and of course movies, too, were and still are making us as callous about killing and death as Hitler's propaganda made the German people during the frenzied prelude to the death camps and World War II.... What I should have said from the pulpit was that we weren't *going* to Hell. We were *in* Hell, thanks to technology which was telling us what to do, instead of the other way around. And it wasn't just TV.

With these words, Vonnegut reminds us of his 1961 story "Harrison Bergeron," particularly its use of television, which desensitized Hazel Bergeron, Harrison's mother, to the murder of her own son, which she witnesses while watching television. True, she sheds tears over what she sees, but she has become so numbed by watching television that she cannot remember why she is crying. Robert Uphaus, in his 1975 essay, "Expected Meaning in Vonnegut's Dead-End Fiction," pointed out that "The history of mankind, Vonnegut implies in the story, is a history of progressive desensitization partly spurred on by the advent of television."

No doubt, Vonnegut—either while writing the story or after sending it for publication—heard about Newton Minow's famous 1961 speech about television programming, called "The Vast Waste-land" [Reprinted in *The Annals of America, Vol. 18, 1961-1968: The Burdens of World Power*]. Minow specifically mentioned violence as a contributor to this wasteland when he listed what a viewer of television would see in a typical day:

game shows, violence, audience participation shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, Western bad men, Western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more violence and cartoons. And, endlessly, commercials—many screaming, cajoling, and offending. And, most of all, boredom.

Near the end of the speech, talking about programming, Minow pleaded for "imagination . . . not sterility; creativity, not imitation; experimentation, not conformity; excellence, not mediocrity." He added, "The power of instantaneous sight and sound is without precedent in mankind's history. This is an awesome power. It has limitless capabilities for good—and for evil."

In "Harrison Bergeron," Vonnegut uses some of the same ideas when he portrays television as a kind of desensitizing, numbing, and clearly thought-stifling, rather than thought-provoking, medium. When Harrison goes not to the seat of government to start his revolution but instead to the television station, Vonnegut illustrates that "awesome power" Minow describes in his speech. Harrison's power to reach the people and make a new reality (declaring himself emperor), Vonnegut agrees, stems from controlling television. Clearly, the government, in the form of the Handicapper General, also understands that power.

While it would be facile to blame television completely for the condition of society in the story, the negative consequences of television, such as encouraging people to not think, form a basis for the rest of the story. The ratification of ludicrously absurd amendments to the constitution requiring a "Big Sister" (United States Handicapper General, Diana Moon Glampers) to monitor the population vigilantly for compliance, effectively creating a police state which ruthlessly enforces the laws, probably results from an uninformed and frightened population. We could see television as a first cause, even though several other causes for the social and political setting of the story likely contributed directly to the ignorance and fear. These causes include an absurd extension of efforts to ensure equality of opportunity to various people formerly excluded from such opportunity either by law or by custom. In other words, sincere efforts to promote equal opportunity by otherwise well-intentioned people could serve as a different kind of opportunity, one that unprincipled politicians or power brokers could exploit by making the victims into the criminals, or into socially unacceptable monsters to be feared by the rest of the population. Another contributory cause points to excesses of unbridled and unethical competition, a kind of social Darwinism.

Most readers of "Harrison Bergeron" fasten on the first paragraph's announcement that everybody was "equal every which way," which piques interest since perceptive readers know that people, in fact, are unequal. The story quickly clarifies both the origin of this equality (Amendments to the Constitution) and the ways people have become "equal": everybody above normal in any way has been required to bear handicaps of astonishingly low technology for such a futuristic story. If one is physically strong, he or she must wear weights to negate that strength. If one is intelligent, he or she must wear a mental handicap radio that emits a "sharp noise" (for example, an auto collision, a siren, a twenty-one gun salute) three times a minute. If one is physically attractive, he or she must wear a mask or some other disfiguring apparatus (for Harrison, a red rubber nose, black caps on his teeth at "snaggle-tooth random," and shaved-off eyebrows hinder his good looks). Perceptive readers see through this illusion: if everyone were equal in every which way, the various handicaps would not be necessary. Conversely, the story remains silent about the fate of those unfortunates who fall below normal. No attempt is made to elevate them to normal or average surfaces, nor is an attempt in the near future. As Martha Meek pointed out in *Critical Survey of Short Fiction* (1993), "The reader is suddenly aware that the idea of equality has been made an instrument of social control" after Diana Moon Glampers kills Harrison. Readers also respond incredulously by asking how something like this scheme could happen in America. Vonnegut answered this question in a 1973 address to the international writers' organization P. E. N: "If tyranny comes to my country, which is an old one now, (and

tyranny can come anywhere, anytime, as nearly as I can tell), I expect to go on writing whatever I please . . . as long as what I write is fiction." That same year, speaking at the dedication of the Wheaton (Illinois) College library, he defined a library as "the memory of mankind. It reminds us that all human beings are to a certain extent impure. To put it another way: All human beings are to some extent greedy and cruel" (both speeches are reprinted in *Wampeters, Foma, & Granfalloons*). In 1979, speaking about Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* at the one-hundredth anniversary of the completion of Twain's house in Connecticut, Vonnegut went further: "I suggest to you that the fatal premise of *A Connecticut Yankee* remains a chief premise of Western civilization . . . to wit: the sanest, most likeable persons, employing superior technology, will enforce sanity throughout the world" (reprinted in *Palm Sunday*). We could argue that Vonnegut uses ironic inversion in "Harrison Bergeron"; insane persons enforce the insanity described as equality in the story.

Vonnegut's reference to Adolf Hitler in the speech at St. John's ironically uses a twentieth-century instance of elected officials gradually turning a nation into a tyrannical dictatorship, in part by scapegoating and demonizing the Jews. In "Harri-son Bergeron," a twenty-first century America enacts Amendments to the Constitution that scapegoat or demonize inequality, regardless of its origin. Americans, in general, do not want to admit that such a government could be in power. But Vonnegut has spoken, indirectly, about this aspect of the story. In a graduation speech at the University of Rhode Island in 1990, titled "Do Not Be Cynical about the American Experiment, Since It Has Only Now Begun," (reprinted in *Fates Worse Than Death*) he avowed, "The most extraordinary change in this country since I was a boy is the decline of racism. Believe me, it could very easily be brought back to full strength again by demagogues." Ironically, Vonnegut adds that the minorities, "with guts and great dignity . . . coupled with the promises of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution," brought about the change in racist attitudes.

Lest readers think that Vonnegut endorses by satire a continuation of the *status quo ante* (or current conditions) in relation to equality, that is, legal and customary inequality, he has commented publicly that he learned social equality through his attendance at public schools of Indianapolis. Later in life, he endorsed legal equal opportunity on at least two different occasions. In the University of Rhode Island graduation address, Vonnegut talked about slavery as a social disease unrecognized for the first one hundred years of American history.

Toward the end of the speech, after criticizing Thomas Jefferson and other slave owners who proclaimed America as a beacon of liberty, he declared, "only in my lifetime has there been any serious talk of giving women and racial minorities anything like economic, legal, and social equality. Let liberty be born at last." Vonnegut leaves little doubt about his stance on this issue. Earlier, in a 1988 piece for *Lear's* magazine, he wrote, "But I find uncritical respect for most works by great thinkers of long ago unpleasant, because they almost all accepted as natural and ordinary the belief that females and minority races and the poor were on earth to be uncomplaining, hardworking, respectful, and loyal servants of white males." In that same piece, he mentions going to a luncheon for a Soviet film makers' union official and talking about *glasnost* (the term for attempts made in the Soviet Union to openly discuss their social

problems, a practice which had been taboo since the 1920s). He added, "Our country has a *glasnost* experiment going on, too, of course. It consists of making women and racial minorities the equals of white males, in terms of both the civility and respect to be accorded them and their rights under the law."

And what of the "dark ages" of unbridled competition? Does Vonnegut agree that competition should be retired in the name and practice of total equality? In various interviews and other non-fiction writing, Vonnegut has shown a disdain for social Darwinism, the theory that individuals or groups achieve advantage over others as the result of genetic or biological superiority. Darwin's theory, in shorthand, survival of the fittest, says that species (not individuals or social groups) adapt to their environment and evolve in order to survive. Those species which do not adapt and evolve become extinct. Social Darwinism says, in essence, that only the best people deserve to survive and thrive. In the 1973 *Playboy* magazine interview, Vonnegut sharply rebukes social Darwinism:

I'm not very grateful for Darwin, although I suspect he was right. His ideas make people crueler. Darwin-ism says to them that people who get sick deserve to be sick, that people who are in trouble must deserve to be in trouble. When anybody dies, cruel Darwinists imagine we're obviously improving ourselves in some way. And any man who's on top is there because he's a superior animal. That's the social Darwinism of the last century, and it continues to boom.

So, Vonnegut clearly decries the kind of competition related to social Darwinism. Vonnegut has championed a free market of ideas and has fought censorship against his own books, and for writers in other countries whose works are suppressed by their governments. As a writer competing in the marketplace of ideas, he has done fairly well, even though he does not believe he has received fair critical treatment during his later years. In essence, he has complained that critics expect writers always to write their best; they cannot be allowed to write a bad or even mediocre book.

Kurt Vonnegut gives the reader of "Harrison Bergeron" a futuristic United States of America in which minds have been so softened or desensitized by television and other forces (fear of enemies) that the people give up their individual rights and aspirations, presumably for the good of the whole society. Sadly, this sacrifice of the individual to the good of society does not improve conditions for the above average, the average, or the below average citizens (who seem to have disappeared, perhaps eliminated?). Instead, in the resulting power vacuum, a ruthless central government created by legislation controls people's lives, which have become as meaningless as if they were machines or automatons. As Stanley Schatt claims in *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.,* "what really is lost" in such a process "is beauty, grace, and wisdom."

Source: Joseph Alvarez, "An Overview of 'Harrison Bergeron'," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

Mowery has taught at Southern Illinois University and Murray State University. In the following essay, he explores the ways Vonnegut uses satire to attack the idea of forced equality.

Kurt Vonnegut is a contemporary American writer best known for his satirical novels. His experiences during World War II, and then as an employee at General Electric, caused him to question many of the power structures in the United States: the government, corporations, the military, and bureaucracies in general. He was most concerned with situations in which the individual was a victim of oppression, and any society that reduced the individual to a mere number, or that limited the individual's opportunities to improve. Vonnegut did not believe that everyone could be better, but that everyone should have the opportunity to try. Therefore, he reacted against any form of suppression that prevented anyone from trying.

As he began his writing career, he might have taken one of two approaches to bring these concerns to the public. He could have chosen to be didactic, lecturing on the ills of society, preaching sermons or writing editorials for newspapers. Instead, he chose another route as his mode of expression: satire.

Satire is a special form of literature that seeks to expose foolish ideas and customs in a society. Satire does not lecture; instead, it exaggerates a part of society and lets the readers decide what to do about it, if anything. Most of the time, satire is witty; sometimes it is subtle; at other times it is blunt. In any case, the satiric writer's task is to ridicule an object, an idea, or a custom, in order to show what the writer thinks is wrong with it. Even though the satire may seem silly or ridiculous, it is not frivolous. The short story, "Harrison Bergeron," may look inconsequential, but Vonnegut's real point is a serious attack on the idea of enforced equality.

Some of the world's best authors were satirists: Shakespeare, Jonathan Swift, George Orwell, Mark Twain. Many current TV hit shows are satiric: Saturday Night Live, The Simpsons, Wayans Brothers, and Mark Russell's PBS Specials. Editorial cartoons are also fine examples of satire. All of these have a common purpose: to expose the weaknesses of some part of society in amusing ways.

The Declaration of Independence says, "All men are created equal." But what happens if a government or some other power takes that notion literally? Can everyone really be equal to everyone else? Does the idea of "a level playing field" mean that everyone gets to win, or that no one wins? Kurt Vonnegut has described this kind of society in "Harrison Bergeron." It was first published in 1961 in *Fantasy and Science Fiction Magazine* and later included in his collection of short stories *Welcome to the Monkey House,* published in 1968.

As a satirist, Kurt Vonnegut's job is to develop and extend his observations to their most extreme or absurd conclusions, to attack a target and turn it upside down and, as

Northrop Frye says [in *University of Toronto Quarterly*], to "complete the process known as *reductio ad absurdum"* (to reduce to absurdity). In the late 1950s, Vonnegut saw countries like the USSR espousing a society with no class distinctions. In "Harrison Bergeron," he creates a society, seemingly American, whose government has gone awry in its attempts to make everyone equal. Some citizens carry extra weights, wear ugly masks, or listen to loud noises in order to ensure that no one can get ahead of anyone else. Therefore, all people are "equal." Even in 1990s some groups and countries still try to equalize everyone. Some religious cults require members to wear similar clothes; the people in power in China often appear in public wearing the same drab clothing.

Vonnegut saw evidence of forced equality around him and believed that it was not good for a country, and certainly not good for an individual. In "Harrison Bergeron," the individual is reduced to a common norm: "they were equal every which way." These equalities were determined and enforced by the Handicapper General. Notice, in the story everyone is lowered to meet the H-G's standard, not raised to meet a higher standard. It is ironic that there are no restrictions on the H-G nor on the H-G's operatives. Similarly, in Orwell's *Animal Farm,* the pigs said, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." In "Harrison Bergeron," to keep George from being "more equal" than anyone else, he is required to wear an ear piece to keep him from developing sequential thoughts. He also wears added weights to keep him from being above average in his physical abilities. This is similar to some horse races that make older horses carry more weight than younger horses. These provisions are intended to make the races more competitive, or more equal.

George and Hazel's son, Harrison, is a special case. He is much more intelligent, more physically capable, and better looking than the rest of society, and even though he is only 14, he is imprisoned as a threat. But he breaks out, removes his handicaps, and, for a brief moment, shows his individuality. He calls on a dancer to join him, and together they soar. Since no one is allowed to look more beautiful or be more physically adept than someone else, or to think new thoughts, the H-G enters and literally shoots down Harrison and the dancer, on live TV. According to Stanley Schatt [in *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.*], when the H-G kills Harrison and the Empress, their deaths are symbolic of the death of "beauty, grace, and wisdom," the three characteristics that are the object of the H-G's control over society.

The Handicapper General then threatens the musicians with death unless they return to their "normal" handicapped status. The 2081 society's norm is enforced by violence and through the threat of violence. In the story, Vonnegut does not specifi-cally ask the reader to agree or disagree with the point that equality through violence is not equality at all. The reader must come to his or her own conclusion.

For satire to succeed, the characters must be believable. Even though the characters may be the victims of silliness, oppression, or some other indignity, the reader must be able to identify with them in some manner. If they are not believable, then the satire will fail.

And Vonnegut is a master of satire. In "Harrison Bergeron," the simple folksy dialogue between George and Hazel is especially effective. In these exchanges, Vonnegut lets his characters say things in understated ways, for example: "That was a doozy." Or, after George winces at another sound in his ear, and Hazel asks what the sound was like, he says, "Sounded like somebody hitting a milk bottle with a ball peen hammer." These quiet conversations are simple and believable, in direct contrast to the noise blasting away every 20 seconds. Vonnegut does not have to say that this is absurd; the reader can feel this without having it pointed out.

It is important to note that in Kurt Vonnegut's satire, most of the characters are sympathetic and likable, even though what is done to them is not. Hazel and George are symbols of good people. They obey the laws and they try to live their "equal" lives without complaining. Hazel is a quiet, docile woman, who meets the criteria set by the H-G for equality without any added handicaps. Despite her "perfectly average intelligence" and physical attributes, she reveals an innate individuality. She believes that the TV announcer ought to get a raise "because he tried to do the best he could."

However, the most revealing part of her comment is the conclusion: ". . . with what God gave him." In this society, it is the H-G's job to neutralize the natural attributes that every citizen was given by God. Here, Hazel reveals her appreciation for the individuality of others. She also shows a religious appreciation that seems to be missing elsewhere in the society. She would "have chimes on Sunday—just chimes. Kind of in honor of religion" transmitted through the ear radio. Her intentions to honor religion and to revere God for giving the announcer his talents, reveal her religious leanings.

Hazel also shows an empathy towards others' misfortunes, as we see in the very last scene. Even though she does not remember that her son had just been killed, she still cries about "something real sad on television." Hazel's feelings ought to be a continued, placid satisfaction that all is well. But deep within her the sympathetic individual cannot be stifled.

Her husband, George, is a thinker and has physical attributes that the H-G has decided to "equalize." But even in the face of governmental oppression, George has thoughts that are above average. These are interrupted by the noises in his ear, but they occur anyway. He thinks that the ballerinas ought not be carrying weights around their necks. George also shows a sympathetic side when he asks Hazel what she was crying about. George is a practical man, who would rather endure the indignity of his "handicaps" than suffer the consequences of tampering with them. He has adapted to the weights. "I don't notice it any more. It's just a part of me." He accepts the laws.

An interesting aspect of George's character is his memory. His short-term memory is disrupted every twenty seconds. "If Hazel hadn't been able to come up with an answer to this question, George couldn't have supplied one. A siren was going off in his head." He forgot his question. But as he watched TV, his long-term memory told him that Harrison was the cause of the shaking when "he correctly identified the earthquake," caused by Harrison's footsteps. But George is unable to maintain the connection

between these two memory patterns. Therefore he remains content to endure the H-G's treatments.

Harrison shows us that the individual can overcome the oppression of the Handicapper General. He is arrested for his exuberant individuality. He is good looking, an athlete, and a genius: the "beauty, grace and wisdom" described by Schatt. His crime is a conspiracy to overthrow the government, according to the announcement. But we can see that his real "crime" is being a gifted individual. In his brief moments of freedom, he not only transcends the laws of the country but also "the law of gravity and the laws of motion." Unlike his father, he is unwilling to suffer the indignities of the H-G's handicaps. He escapes the oppression of the handicaps he was forced to wear and for his troubles he is shot down and killed. In this scene, Vonnegut shows the reader that even the most oppressive rule cannot totally stifle excellence and individuality.

In the 2081 society, the Handicapper General rules with an iron fist: "Two years in prison and two thousand dollars fine for every ball I took out" or being shot to death, people would not obey, but "start cheating on the laws." "And pretty soon we'd be right back to the dark ages again, with everybody competing against everybody else." Even George and Hazel recognize that the individual would rise up at the first lapse in governmental controls.

At the end of the story, Kurt Vonnegut implies that there is no government capable of suppressing the individual completely. The inner strength of human nature at its finest is more powerful than ill-conceived laws, and the H-G's rules and guns. However, he leaves unsaid whether or not standing up to an oppressive government is worth losing one's life. This conclusion is left for the reader to decide.

Source: Carl Mowery, "An Overview of 'Harrison Bergeron'," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 1999.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Festa discusses Vonnegut's use of satirical style in discussing themes of technology and life in such stories as "Harri-son Bergeron."

From the beginning of his professional writing career, Vonnegut evinced a strong inclination to write satire. Stories such as "Harrison Bergeron," "Report on the Barnhouse Effect," "The Euphio Question," "Welcome to the Monkey House," and his first novel, *Player Piano,* fit easily and recognizably into the satiric genre. That is, they (1) sustain a reductive attack on their objects, (2) convey to their intended readers significances at odds with the literal or surface meanings, and (3) are pervaded and dominated by various satiric techniques. Furthermore, the satiric objects in those works are easily identifiable and familiar, and their satiric significances are obvious. Judged solely on his early fiction, Vonnegut emerges as a somewhat traditional satirist. Were he to have continued writing in that way, we all would have joined hands long ago to slam down the lid on his box.

The early satire is primarily concerned with the evils of technology and the follies of the American way of life, but, beginning with the second novel, Vonnegut broadens his field of attention to issues of a more cosmic dimension, such as the question of the meaning of life. Also, the satire in his work becomes less apparent: as a consequence, the reader's attention is focused more steadily on the fiction. Yet, while his style and form and fiction are more imaginative creations, while his work manifests so much growth and development in technique and thought, it fails to satisfy certain expectations of consistency of idea, and it fails to yield a comprehensive unambiguous interpretatio....

Source: Conrad Festa, "Vonnegut's Satire," in *Vonnegut in America: An Introduction to the Life and Work of Kurt Vonnegut,* edited by Jerome Klinkowitz and Donald L. Lawler, Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1977, pp. 133-50.

Critical Essay #4

In the following excerpt, Wood and Wood outline the theme of human identity found in many of Vonnegut's works, including "Harrison Bergeron."

The same ideas which are treated in the novels appear as well in [Vonnegut's] science-fiction short stories. Such pieces as "Report on the Barnhouse Effect," "Harrison Bergeron," "Welcome to the Monkey House," "The Euphio Question," "The Manned Missiles," "Epicac," and "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow" all concern themselves repeatedly with technological problems only as those problems express and explicate character—the character of the human race. Vonnegut proves repeatedly, in brief and pointed form, that men and women remain fundamentally the same, no matter what technology surrounds them. The perfect example of this might be found in "Unready to Wear," in which the shucking off of the physical bodies of men has not changed their basic identities, but only freed them to become *more,* not less, human. The themes, however, which are treated of necessity in piecemeal manner in the short stories, are pulled together in the novels into a world which becomes more complete and whole as one reads on toward *Slaughterhouse-Five.* The absurd, alienated nature of the universe is dealt with in each novel, always with some new depth of perception, some new slant; characters from the short stories and the earlier novels find their way into the later works. The same city, Ilium, in upstate New York, remains a central symbol of the twisted future of mankind....

Source: Karen and Charles Wood, "The Vonnegut Effect: Science Fiction and Beyond," in *The Vonnegut Statement,* edited by Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer, Dell Publishing Co., 1973, pp. 133-57.

Topics for Further Study

Research the process by which proposed amendments to the United States Constitution pass Congress and are ratified into law. Based on what you find out, do you think it is likely that the Constitution will have 213 amendments in 2081? Why or why not?

Investigate the controversy caused by Federal Communications Commission chairman Newton Minow's May, 1961, speech in which he labeled television "a vast wasteland." Compare Minow's historical commentary about television to current commentaries and note how much (or how little) has changed.

Read the United States' founding documents—particularly the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, or the Federalist Papers—to determine the promise of equality or lack thereof found within them. Compare the ideas found in these documents with those in documents associated with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s—particularly the 1954 U. S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*—and the early 1960s, particularly Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and his 1963 speech known as "I Have a Dream."

Compare and Contrast

1964: President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. Title VII of the Act establishes The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, which prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion.

Late 1990s: Affirmative action programs, which set guidelines for preferred hiring of minority and women workers and students, come under fire. Businesses and universities are sued for reverse discrimination by whites passed over for various positions and promotions.

1950s: The CIA experiments with various forms of mind control, including testing LSD, a hallucinogen, as a truth serum on U.S. soldiers.

1993: Rumors surface that the FBI is considering using an acoustic mind control device during a standoff with cult leader David Koresh in Waco, Texas. The device, developed by a Russian scientist, is supposedly capable of placing thoughts in a person's mind without the person's knowledge of the source of the thoughts.

1960s: Young people unite in unprecedented numbers to protest the Vietnam War, racism, and sexual discrimination. Vonnegut's writings become very popular in this politically active era.

1990s: "Hate crime" legislation provides stiffer penalties for those convicted of harassment and other crimes directed at people based on their ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical or mental disabilities. Critics say the laws criminalize thought rather than action, and that punishment varies according to the characteristics of the victim.

What Do I Read Next?

The New Atlantis, Francis Bacon's 1627 version of utopia (an idealized community or state). Bacon conceived of a community of scholars and scientists who rule for the benefit of each other and mankind.

Brave New World, Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel. In this dystopian (from dystopia, the opposite of utopia, a world in which realities undermine ideals), satirical portrait of a futuristic society, citizens have given up much of their own humanity for the social good in another totalitarian political system.

"I Have a Dream," Martin Luther King's 1963 speech. King delivered this famous speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., to a crowd of civil rights demonstrators. It called for a society in which people have equal opportunity and are judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," Ursula K. Leguin's 1973 story. In this vaguely futuristic society, the good of the community, including everything from personal happiness to bountiful crops, depends on the severe maltreatment of one child, a scapegoat. Without the scapegoat, the citizens of Omelas believe their whole society would fall apart. The title characters who leave cannot stand to base their happiness on the suffering of another person, especially a child.

"The Vast Wasteland," Newton Minow's 1961 speech. In this speech the new Chair of the Federal Communications Commission indicted television for its lack of quality programming, calling television broadcasting a "vast wasteland."

Utopia, Thomas More's 1516 imagined defi-nition of an ideal society. This idealistic utopian look at society employs the idea of communitarianism, a sense of equality throughout social strata, based on Christian humanism and on an economic scheme that increased productivity.

Animal Farm, George Orwell's 1945 novel. This dystopian satire of an alleged egalitarian society clearly reveals the flaws of the ideal of equality compared to the difficulty of enacting the ideal as reality. A bigger target is totalitarian government disguised as egalitarianism, specifically Stalin's regime in the USSR.

1984, George Orwell's 1949 novel. This dystopian satire of totalitarian government does not allow human emotions, such as love; nor does it allow privacy (Big Brother is always watching through television cameras/screens everywhere). The government also distorts truth through the use of "Newspeak."

The Republic, Plato's 380 B.C. imaginative definition of an ideal political society. One of the first of the literary utopias, Plato's version describes a select elite, who control the actions of the rest of the people, and who depend on slave labor.

"Resistance to Civil Government" (or "Civil Disobedience"), Henry David Thoreau's 1849 essay. Thoreau asserts that a citizen must break unjust laws in order to change them. He suggests that a single individual constitutes a "majority of one" if this individual is more right than his neighbors, and judges law on morality, not expediency.

Further Study

The Annals of America, Vol. 17, 1950-1960: Cold War in the Nuclear Age, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1968.

The volume features important events and their dates in a chronology, as well as reprints of original speeches and documents

Klinkowitz, Jerome, and Donald L. Lawler, eds. *Vonnegut in America: An Introduction to the Life and Work of Kurt Vonnegut,* Delacorte Press-Seymour Lawrence, 1977, 304 p.

Includes Conrad Festa's perceptive essay on Vonnegut as a satirist and a complete bibliography of Vonnegut's works.

Klinkowitz, Jerome, Lawler, Donald L., and John Somer, eds. *The Vonnegut Statement,* Delacorte Press, 1973, 286 p.

Explores Vonnegut's public and personal life, as well as the novels. Klinkowitz proposes that Vonnegut represents middle-class, rather than rebellious values.

Layman, Richard, ed. *American Decades: 1950-1959, Vol. 6,* Manly, Inc.-Gale Research, 1994.

Provides information on events from the 1950s, classified into such categories as "Government and Politics," "Law and Justice," and "Lifestyles and Social Trends."

Layman, Richard, ed. *American Decades: 1960-1969, Vol. 7,* Manly, Inc.-Gale Research, 1994.

Provides information on the 1960s, classified into such categories as "Government and Politics," "Law and Justice," and "Lifestyles and Social Trends."

Leeds, Marc. *The Vonnegut Encyclopedia: An Authorized Compendium,* Greenwood Press, 1995, 693 p.

This alphabetically arranged encyclopedia contains entries on everything from Celia Aamons (from *Cat's Cradle*) to Zog (a Kilgore Trout character from *Breakfast of Champions*).

Merrill, Robert, ed. *Critical Essays on Kurt Vonnegut,* G. K. Hall, 1990, 235 p.

Includes reviews of Vonnegut's novels; discussions of his early works; an extended section of essays on *Slaughterhouse-Five*; and discussions of the later works.

Mustazza, Leonard, ed. *The Critical Response to Kurt Vonnegut,* Greenwood Press, 1994, 346 p.

This collection of essays, original reviews of books, and excerpts from other books traces the scholarly reputation of Vonnegut over the years. Most published Vonnegut scholars are represented, as are such writers as Michael Crichton, John Irving, Doris Lessing, and Terry Southern.

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Vonnegut, Kurt. "America: What's Good, What's Bad?" in*Vogue,* Vol. 162, July, 1973, 62-64. Reprinted as "Address at Rededication of Wheaton College Library" in his *Wampeters, Foma, & Granfalloons: Opinions,* New York: Dell, 1974, pp. 225-29.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Fates Worse Than Death: An Autobiographical Collage of the 1980s,* New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1991, pp. 82-5, 113-16, 149-52.

Vonnegut, Kurt. "Mark Twain," in his *Palm Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage,* New York: Delacorte Press, 1981, pp. 166-72.

Vonnegut, Kurt. "Playboy Interview," in *Playboy,* Vol. 20, July, 1973, pp. 57-60+. Reprinted in his *Wampeters, Foma, &Granfalloons: Opinions,* New York: Dell, 1974, pp. 237-85.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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