

Title: *Slaughterhouse 5*

by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (Published in 1969)

Approved for use in Grades 11-12

Summary of the Work:

A 1969 semi-autobiographic science fiction-infused anti-war novel by Kurt Vonnegut. It follows the life and experiences of Billy Pilgrim, from his early years, to his time as an American soldier and chaplain's assistant during World War II, to the post-war years, with Billy occasionally traveling through time. The text centers on Billy's capture by the German Army and his survival of the Allied firebombing of Dresden as a prisoner of war, an experience which Vonnegut himself lived through as an American serviceman (*Wikipedia* "Slaughterhouse Five").

Rationale:

"More than fifty years after its initial publication at the height of the Vietnam War, Vonnegut's portrayal of political disillusionment, PTSD, and postwar anxiety feels as relevant, darkly humorous, and profoundly affecting as ever, an enduring beacon through our own era's uncertainties" (from the publisher's description).

The novel addresses wide-ranging themes from mental illness to postmodernism, all seated in a backdrop of science fiction. It features an unreliable narrator (an important literary device for any advanced study of literature) and science fiction tropes such as time travel and alien encounters. Its non-linear structure, prominent use of motifs and symbols, and allusions to historical events make it an excellent piece of literature as well as an entertaining story.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Kurt Vonnegut's masterpiece, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is "a desperate, painfully honest attempt to confront the monstrous crimes of the twentieth century" (*Time*). Reviews appear in *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times*.

- * Resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any Teacher-Librarian to view the scholarly sources.
- * Scholarly reviews are also available online. Contact the Teacher-Librarian for guidance.

Noted Distinction:

The reviews of *Slaughterhouse-Five* have been largely positive since the March 31, 1969 review in *the New York Times* stated: "you'll either love it, or push it back in the science-fiction corner." It was Vonnegut's first novel to become a bestseller, staying on the *New York Times* bestseller list for sixteen weeks and peaking at No. 4. In 1970, *Slaughterhouse-Five* was nominated for best-novel Nebula and Hugo Awards.... It has since been widely regarded as a classic anti-war novel, and has appeared in *Time* magazine's list of the 100 best English-language novels written since 1923.

Selected by the Modern Library as one of the 100 best novels of all time.

Readability

- Lexile Score: 850
- Readability Level: 6

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The film meets the [Learning Resources Guidelines](#) and [Board Policy](#).

Approval:

Submitted to Committee: August 2023

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Vonnegut's characteristic tongue-in-cheek delivery makes this novel

Connection to the Curriculum:

Students in Science Fiction study time travel stories in order to

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enormously fun to read, and at times laugh-out-loud funny, which makes the darker themes regarding war (which are derived from the author's own experiences in WWII) and the human condition all the more striking. The text has at times been controversial, and CommonLit offers Vonnegut's open letter to a North Dakota schoolboard that banned the novel in 1973, titled "I Am Very Real." This short supplementary text pairs well with the novel and gives a jumping-off point for discussions (or writing) about such issues as censorship and the role of literature and storytelling in education, as well as work with satire, audience, and tone.

explore the ways in which authors use paradoxes and other science fiction tropes to explore complexities of science, current events, and the human psyche. *Slaughterhouse 5* explicitly discusses themes of mental health and PTSD, which makes it an excellent text to use in the Time Travel unit.

Standard Alignment: *(Type which standard number then link to specific standard document on OPI website.)*

[RL.11-12.1](#)

[RL.11-12.3](#)

[RL.11-12.5](#)

[RL.11-12.6](#)

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

This text is primarily used in the Science Fiction elective course.