



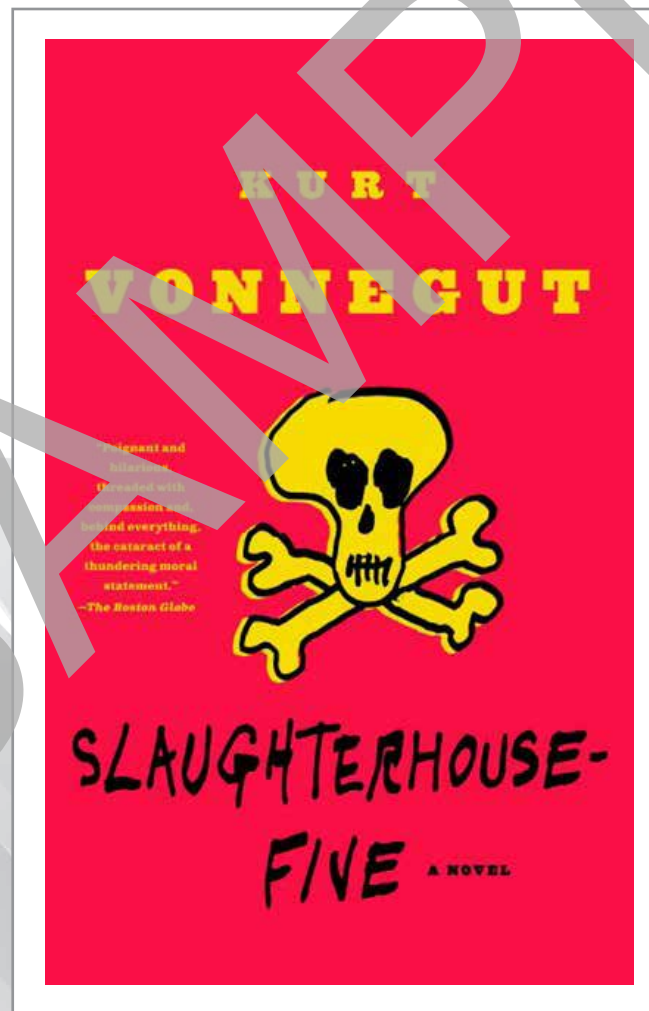
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Slaughterhouse-Five

Kurt Vonnegut



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Slaughterhouse- Five

Kurt Vonnegut

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Predicting, cause/effect,
inference, sequencing

Thinking

Research, compare/contrast,
analysis, brainstorming,
critical thinking

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral reading,
film viewing, music,
storytelling, interviewing

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,
application

Literary Elements

Characterization, symbolism,
irony, personification, simile,
metaphor, allusion, theme,
point of view, genre, conflict

Writing

Poetry, public service
announcement, report,
monologue, précis, script,
persuasive essay

Across the Curriculum

Art—drawing, caricature,
diorama, collage; History—
current events, WWII

Genre: fiction/science fiction

Setting: Germany and Ilium, New York; primarily 1944-1968

Date of First Publication: 1969

Point of View: first person (Chapter One) intermingled with third person omniscient (Chapters Two through Nine). Chapter Ten is a mixture of the two points of view.

Themes: human dignity, the insanity of war, acceptance, fate

Style: personal narrative intermingled with disjointed, impersonal narrative; interweaves dark humor with science fiction and realistic fiction

Summary

Billy Pilgrim, an American soldier, is a World War II prisoner of war in Dresden, Germany, when the city is annihilated by a massive firebombing. He and other American prisoners, with their four guards, emerge from the underground shelter of a meat locker after the firestorm to view the massive massacre. Billy is rescued and repatriated shortly thereafter. He becomes “unstuck in time” earlier in the war and disjointedly travels from one event in his life to another, including his capture by aliens from Tralfamadore. Attempting to deal with the insanity of war, Billy decides to tell his story to the world. He concludes that war is inexplicable and inevitable. The story mirrors Vonnegut’s experiences in the war, especially the firestorm at Dresden.

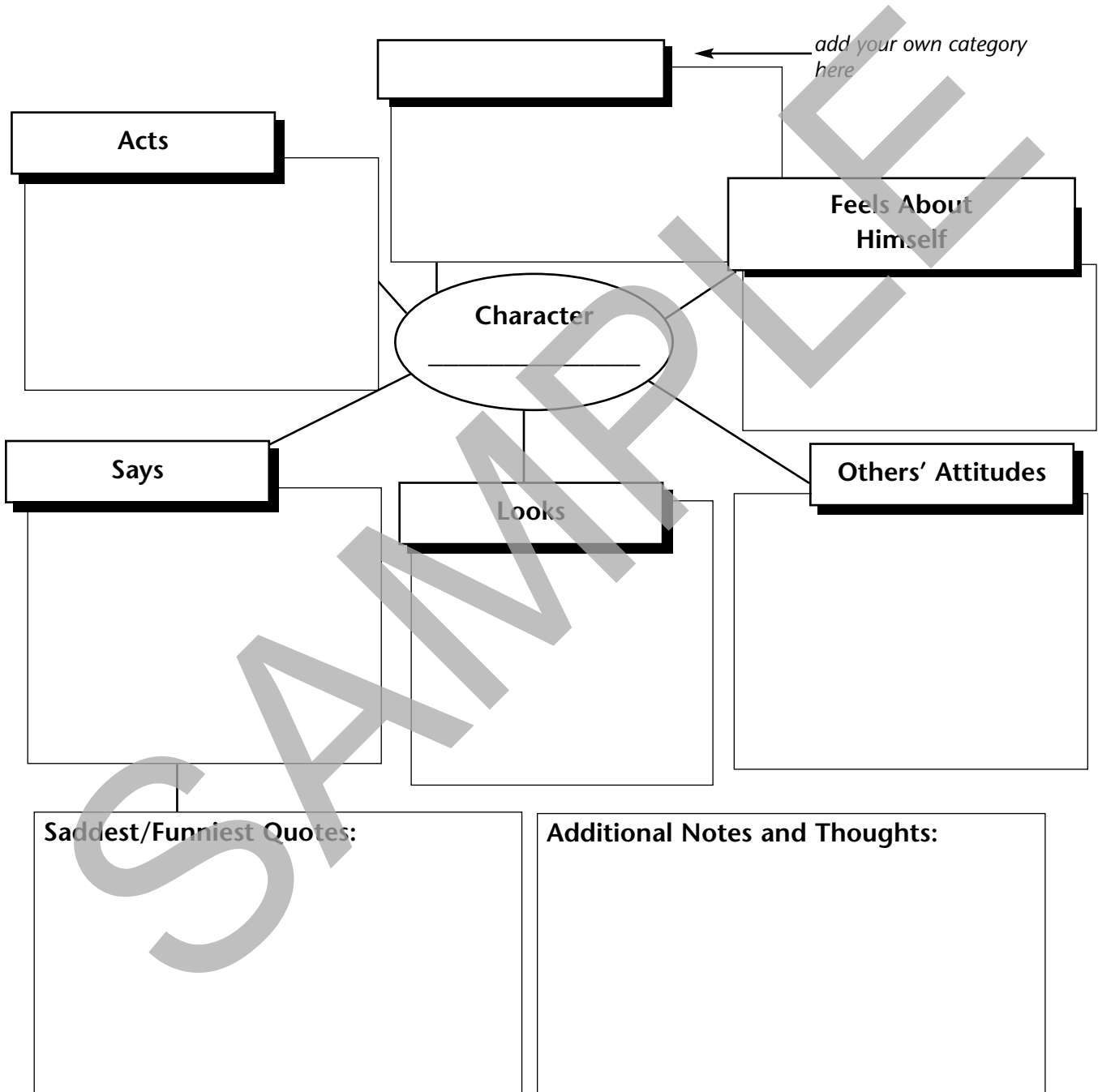
Characters

Kurt Vonnegut: first-person narrator of portions of the book; third-person narrator of other sections. Vonnegut was a prisoner of war during the Dresden firebombing, and the novel reflects his anti-war viewpoint. He appears in Billy’s story periodically; e.g., as a distressed American soldier in the latrine at the German prison camp. His repetition of the phrase “So it goes” symbolizes man’s inability to control death.

Billy Pilgrim: protagonist; veteran of World War II, where he had been a chaplain’s assistant; a prisoner of war who survives the Dresden firebombing. After the war, he marries and becomes a wealthy optometrist. Because he is “unstuck in time,” he cannot control his disjointed travels to different points of time in his life. He believes he is captured by aliens and taken to live on their planet, Tralfamadore, where he is placed on exhibit in a zoo, mates with a beautiful young woman who is also captive, and fathers a child. He survives a plane crash but has already traveled in time to his death in 1976.

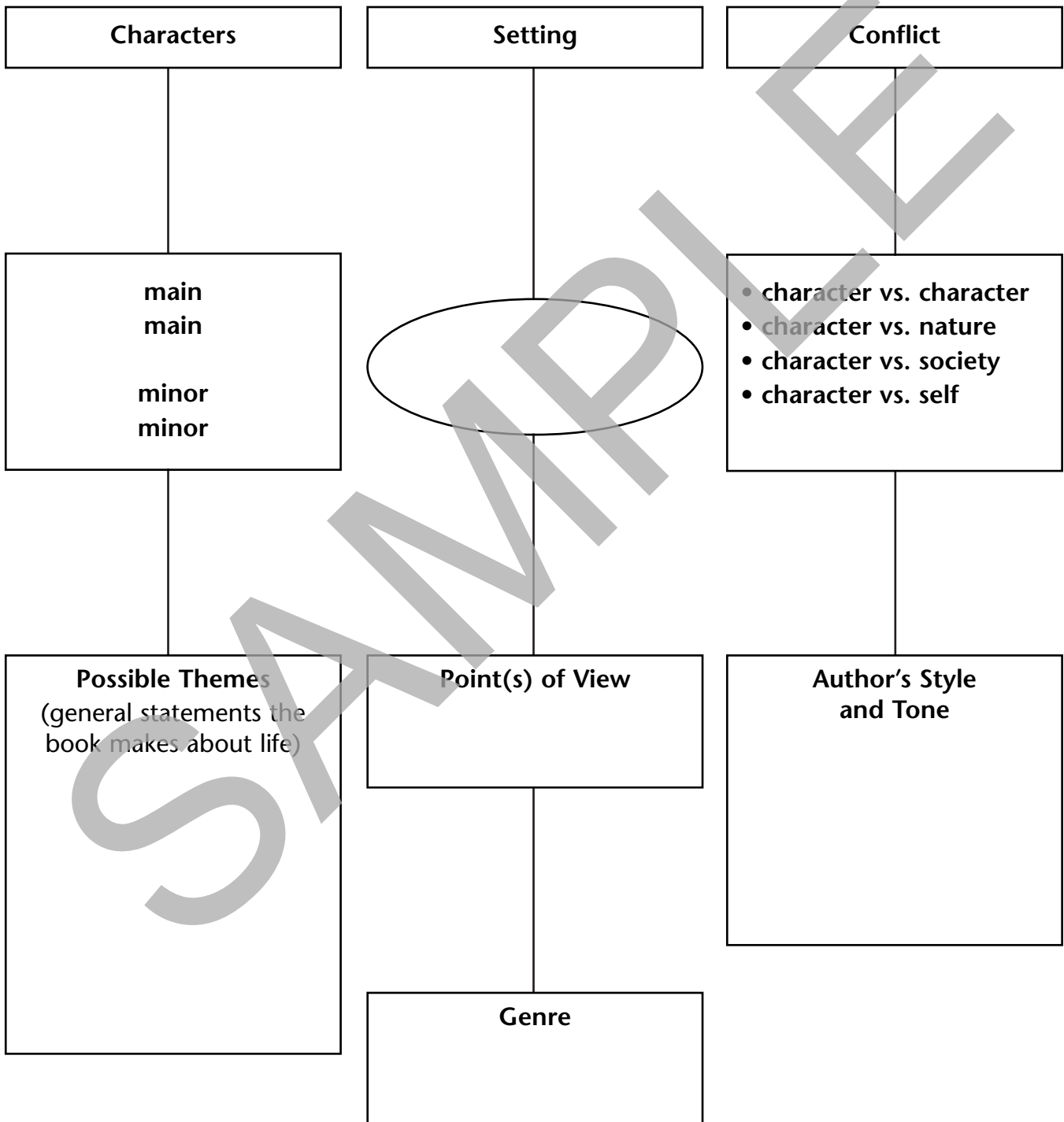
Attribute Web

Directions: Create an attribute web for Billy Pilgrim. As you read, feel free to add another category of your own, additional notes, etc.



Novel Web Diagram

Directions: The oval is the place for the book's title. Then fill in the boxes to summarize the story.



Chapter One, pp. 1-22

This chapter is Vonnegut's first-person narration. Vonnegut and a war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare, return to the slaughterhouse in Dresden, Germany, where they had been kept as prisoners during World War II. He reflects on his long-standing intent to write a book about Dresden. Vonnegut refers to the finished work as short, jumbled, and jangled because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre.

Vocabulary

incinerated (2)
bigotry (15)
titillated (21)

infinity (3)
unmitigated (15)

anthropology (8)
piety (16)

pneumatic (8)
magnanimity (16)

Discussion Questions

1. Analyze the symbolism of the obscene limerick, the nonsense song with no ending, and an anti-glacier book. (*The limerick symbolizes the obscenity of war. The song, whose last line is also the first, symbolizes the inability to escape from memories and bring closure to the war and emphasizes that history will keep repeating itself with more wars. The book signifies that, just as there will always be glaciers, there will also always be war. pp. 2-3*)
2. Examine indications that the narrator still suffers from the aftereffects of World War II, especially the destruction of Dresden. (*He has waited twenty-three years to write about it; he often reflects on the "death" of war; he gets drunk late at night and tries to telephone old friends to reminisce about the war; his best outline was written on a roll of wallpaper, where all lines come together, with the destruction of Dresden represented by a vertical line passing through all the others; he refers to soap and candles made from dead Jews; he attempts to find out from Air Force officials more details about the raid on Dresden; he says there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre and he tells his sons they must never take part in massacres; he finishes the book but vows he will never look back again. Throughout chapter*)
3. Summarize what this chapter reveals about the destruction of Dresden. (*Vonnegut refers to tons of human bone meal in the ground; the cab driver's mother was incinerated in the Dresden firestorm; Edgar Derby died by firing squad for taking a teapot that wasn't his; the massacre was worse than Hiroshima; the true facts are still military top secret. pp. 1-11*)
4. Analyze Mary O'Hare's reaction to Vonnegut's plan to call his book "The Children's Crusade." (*She is afraid his book will glamorize war and be produced as a movie that will look so wonderful people will want more of them. She tells him that they [Vonnegut, O'Hare, and others] were just "babies" in the war. He tells her his book will not be written for actors. She realizes that if he calls his book "The Children's Crusade," it will portray the horrors rather than the glories of war because very few of the 30,000 children who volunteered for the crusade to recover Jerusalem survived. pp. 14-15*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Refer to the religious imagery in the allusion to Lot's wife (Bible, Genesis 19:26). Have students complete the following: "Vonnegut is a 'pillar of salt' because..."

-
- Note the reference to the New York World's Fair and present the following information: twice held there; 1939-1940: theme, "Building the World of Tomorrow"; 1964-1965: theme, "Peace Through Understanding." Correlate these themes with Vonnegut's anti-war sentiments.
 - Have students research the "Children's Crusade" and compare the facts with Vonnegut's interpretation.
 - Note the literary devices: **Similes**—breath like mustard gas and roses (p. 4); carp as big as atomic submarines (p. 12); carrying a bottle of Irish whiskey like a dinner bell (p. 12) **Metaphors**—brass and velvet cartridges: food for pneumatic tubes (p. 8); kitchen: operating room (p. 13); young soldiers: foolish virgins (p. 14)—alludes to Biblical parable of ten virgins, Matthew 25:1-12; truth: death (p. 21); narrator: pillar of salt (p. 22) **Personification**—Death (p. 21)

Chapter Two, pp. 23-51

This chapter begins the story of Billy Pilgrim. He travels back and forth through time to reveal important landmarks in his life, including his experiences in World War II and after the war. He tells of his abduction by the Tralfamadorians.

Vocabulary

illusion (27)	cockles (28)	theoretical (31)	roweled (37)
scathingly (38)	fidelity (38)	unambiguous (39)	punitive (45)
clemency (45)	infinitesimal (49)	ludicrous (50)	

Discussion Questions

- Analyze the significance of "Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time" (p. 23). Discuss what first causes Billy to experience time travel. *(This sets the stage for the rest of the novel. Billy wanders from one moment to another in his life: birth, death, everything in between. The events are not chronologically sequenced, and he has no control over where he is going next. First time [pp. 43-44]: the trek through the forest after the Battle of the Bulge, symbolic of his retreat from war. This triggers his memory of nearly dying when his father, determined to teach him to swim, threw him into the deep end of the swimming pool. Time travel occurs throughout chapter)*
- Analyze the statement, "Frames are where the money is" (p. 24), and the irony of Billy's profession. *(This is a play on words referring to both Billy's profession as an optometrist and the frames of time that indicate various segments of his life. He has become wealthy as an optometrist and is able to prescribe glasses to enable people to see better, yet he feels inadequate to make people "see" the horrors of war. The time frames reflecting the carnage at Dresden fail to impact the repetition of wars. Throughout book)*
- Discuss Billy Pilgrim and analyze the symbolism of his name. Refer to the folk song, "Billy Boy." *(His first name symbolizes innocence: Billy, an innocent young man who is charming and naïve; Pilgrim: a person on a journey, a traveler, or a wanderer, as Billy is in his travels in time. As a soldier, Billy views himself as weak, fearful, and incompetent; some consider him to be mentally*