

Teacher's Guide to Chapter Five of *Slaughterhouse-Five* or an incomplete guide to ideas worth discussing in this section of the book

1. The first "brief, urgent message" after the explanation of the Tralfamadorian novel is a story about Billy and his family at the Grand Canyon (112)*. A Tralfamadorian interpretation of this moment could be that not all moments are beautiful to everyone. As Earthlings, we can remember the time that Billy's father threw him into the pool in order to teach him to swim and discuss what picture of Billy as a child is emerging and what picture of Billy's family is starting to develop.
2. This activity presents a good opportunity to discuss the Tralfamadorian view of war and the question of "why." On p. 116, an American soldier asks a guard "Why me?" and the guard responds "Vy you? Vy anybody?" Refer students back to pp. 96-97 for a Tralfamadorian discussion of the question "why" and to pp. 147-150 for a Tralfamadorian discussion of war. On page 150 we learn that the Tralfamadorian view of war and suffering is to "Ignore the awful times, and concentrate on the good ones" (150). Have students reflect on the question if this perspective is the message of the book. Are we meant to finish reading *Slaughterhouse-Five* and proceed with our lives ignoring the awful times and concentrating only on the good ones? Does this view seem to line up with Vonnegut's assertion on p. 4 that this is an "anti-war book"? Discuss the difference between a prescriptive message and a descriptive one. Is the Tralfamadorian view of war descriptive of how we treat war and suffering in our world or is it a prescription for how we should?
3. In this section of the book we meet the English prisoners of war. They are outrageous and darkly funny. What is the effect of the contrast between the starving, half-dressed, sick Billy Pilgrim and the ways in which the English POWs have been amusing themselves? On page 135 we encounter the subtitle of the novel, "the Children's Crusade." What do we learn from the POWs about the subtitle of the novel? Who else might have an imagined picture of the war rather than a real one? What are the dangers and consequences of having old men planning a war that children are fighting?
4. We learn in this section about Billy's nervous breakdown. What causes his crisis (see p. 128 "[he] had found life meaningless, partly because of what he had seen in the war")? How might this relate to Billy becoming unstuck in time? How would the Tralfamadorians answer the problem of life having no meaning?
5. On pages 138-140 we hear about Kilgore Trout's novel *The Gospel from Outer Space*. The visitor from outer space is curious as to why Christians "found it so easy to be cruel." He concludes that contrary to popular opinion, the gospels actually teach "Before you kill somebody, make absolutely sure he isn't well connected." What alternative gospel does the visitor from outer space propose? Why would this be meaningful or relevant to Billy Pilgrim? Does it fit with the Tralfamadorian view of the world and suffering? Earthlings view of the world and suffering?

*All page numbers refer to the Dial Press edition