

“Harrison Bergeron” Questions

Directions – After having read the story, please respond to each question making sure to use evidence from the text to support your answers.

1. Citing examples from the text, what can you infer about the type of government that was in existence in the year 2081?
2. What are some human qualities the author highlights as characteristics that would give one person an “unfair advantage” over someone else? What did the U.S. Handicapper General do to counter these traits in order to establish equality amongst all? Cite specific examples from the text.
3. In the first paragraph, Vonnegut uses the words “unceasing vigilance.” What do these words mean? What implications do they have in the text?
4. Indirect characterization is when an author develops the character through his actions, dialogues, thoughts, appearance, or other character reactions. How does Vonnegut use indirect characterization to create sympathy for George and Hazel? Use textual support.
5. George Bergeron wears a radio that broadcasts various noises to prohibit him from developing any intellectual thoughts. Trace the increasing intensity of these noises that George hears throughout the story. How do the noises parallel the escalating tragedy of George’s and Hazel’s lives?
6. How does Harrison’s rebellion reveal his character and his values? Support your opinion with evidence from the text.
7. Vonnegut uses the term “neutralizing gravity.” What does “neutralizing” mean? Why does he use this term here, and how does this word choice emphasize his point?
8. Identify some figurative language in the description of the scene with Harrison and the dancing Ballerina. How does the language affect the tone of the piece, and what does it reveal about what Vonnegut values?
9. The entire narrative takes place as George and Hazel sit in front of the television. What is Vonnegut’s purpose in having the television set as the primary setting? Cite textual evidence for the significance of the television.
10. Vonnegut says, “It was then that Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General, came into the studio with a double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun. She fired twice, and the Emperor and the Empress were dead before they hit the floor.” How does this paragraph compare to the description of the dance that comes before it? How does the shift in tone here support the theme?
11. Just after watching the televised murder of his son, George hears “the sound of a riveting gun in his head.” Why does Vonnegut reference this particular kind of tool? How might this multiple meaning word enhance the themes in the story?
12. What do you think Vonnegut might be trying to say about today’s society and the role a government can play in achieving equality among people? Use examples from the story to support your opinion.